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CIA draws cloak of secrecy tighter

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WASHINGTON — The Central Intelligence Agency, under Director William Casey, shows signs of fading away — not from its intelligence duties, but from public view.

Two hints the agency is pulling its cloak tighter are its decision to halt private briefings for reporters and the announcement it is "re-viewing" its array of publicly available publications to determine which should remain public.

Orders for the moves were said to have come directly from Casey, chief of secret intelligence in the World War II Office of Strategic Services, who was a key figure in President Ronald Reagan's campaign organization before taking over the CIA.

No announcement was made about the end of the reporters' briefings, which were conducted by CIA analysts at the agency's Langley, Va., headquarters, but a spokesman said, "It is a decision made in the agency to cope with an imposition on analysts' time."

The briefings, requested by reporters, generally involved unclassified material concerning political and economic affairs in foreign countries. The spokesman said 125 such briefings were conducted in 1980, down from a high of 247 in 1975.

As for the review of unclassified publications, the spokesman said, "there are no preconceptions on the review. It is a review."

The materials — emblazoned with the CIA symbol — cover such subjects as Soviet oil production, world grain production, Soviet weapons expenditures and leaders of Communist-ruled countries. The agency also publishes excellent gazeteers, including detailed maps of areas in the news.

The briefings for reporters were arranged by the CIA's Office of Public Affairs, which was established in 1977 by former CIA director Stans-

field Turner. The office, headed by former Navy Capt. Herbert Hetu, has a staff of 14.

According to a statement, the public affairs office "still has the responsibility of protecting (intelligence) sources and methods and preserving secrecy but no longer is encouraged to say as little as possible about the agency."

That may change under Casey, who has yet to give a formal news conference, although he has answered questions at many public meetings.

Casey, 68, is not averse to public appearances — in the month of May he spoke publicly six times — but he keeps his distance from reporters.

It also may be significant that Casey chose Adm. Bobby Ray Inman as his deputy. Inman was the head of an intelligence branch even more secret than the CIA — the National Security Agency.

The NSA monitors foreign communications and codes and protects the security of US secret channels.

It has never had any contact with the press and is not even listed in the Congressional Directory of government agencies. It is part of the Defense Department and reportedly has a multi-billion-dollar budget, but is not listed in the Pentagon phone book.

The CIA had no office or person responsible for answering media queries when it was created in 1947. Beginning in 1951, the CIA designated an official — initially a military man — to deal with the press.

The agency, in a statement several years ago, said it had moved into the public-affairs area "with no little trepidation," but was forced by unfolding events to become more visible.

"Hard as it tried . . . the agency could not avoid the spotlight. Indeed, the public affairs function at CIA developed largely in response for a need for crisis handling — a kind of ad hoc evolution by flap."